THE BOX OF GOD

LEW SARETT

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By Lew Sarett

MANY MANY MOONS

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LEW SARETT

Author of "Many Many Moons"

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TO
MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER

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L. S.

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THE BOX OF GOD

The Helen Haire Levinson Prize was awarded to the poem, "The Box of God," as the best contribution to *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse,* for the year 1921.

PART I

THE BOX OF GOD

IN THE LAND OF K'TCHÉE-GAH-MÉE:

Lake Superior
Flute-reed River
Rainy Lake
Lake-of-the-woods

THE BOX OF GOD

I: Broken Bird

O broken bird,
Whose whistling silver wings have known the lift
Of high mysterious hands, and the wild sweet music
Of big winds among the ultimate stars!—
The black robed curés put your pagan Indian
Soul in their white man's House of God, to lay
Upon your pagan lips new songs, to swell
The chorus of amens and hallelujahs.
In simple faith and holy zeal, they flung
Aside the altar-tapestries, that you
Might know the splendor of God's handiwork,
The shining glory of His face. O eagle,
Crippled of pinion, clipped of soaring wing,
They brought you to a four-square box of God;
And they left you there to flutter against the bars
In futile flying, to beat against the gates,
To droop, to dream a little, and to die.

Ah, Joe Shing-ób—by the sagamores revered
As Spruce, the Conjurer, by the black-priests dubbed
The Pagan Joe—how clearly I recall
Your conversion in the Big-Knife's House of God,
Your wonder when you faced its golden glories.
Don't you remember?—when first you sledged from out

The frozen Valley of the Sleepy-eye,
And hammered on the gates of Fort Brazeau—
To sing farewell to Áh-nah-qúod, the Cloud,
Sleeping, banked high with flowers, clothed in the pomp
Of white man's borrowed garments in the church?
Oh, how your heart, as a child's heart beating before
High wonder-workings, thrilled at the burial splendor!—
The coffin, shimmering-black as moonlit ice,
And gleaming in a ring of waxen tapers;
After the chant of death, the long black robes,
Blown by the wind and winding over the hills
With slow black songs to the marked-out-place-of-death;
The solemn feet that moved along the road
Behind the wagon-with-windows, the wagon-of-death,
With its jingling silver harness, its dancing plumes.
Oh, the shining splendor of that burial march,
The round-eyed wonder of the village throng!—
And oh, the fierce-hot hunger, the burning envy
That seared your soul when you beheld your friend
Achieve such high distinction from the black-robes!

And later, when the cavalcade of priests
Wound down from the fenced-in-ground, like a slow black worm
Crawling upon the snow—don't you recall?—
The meeting in the mission?—that night, your first
In the white man's lodge of holy-medicine?
How clearly I can see your hesitant step
On the threshold of the church; within the door

Your gasp of quick surprise, your breathless mouth;
Your eyes round-white before the glimmering taper,
The gold-filigreed censer, the altar hung
With red rosettes and velvet soft as an otter's
Pelt in the frost of autumn, with tinsel sparkling
Like cold blue stars above the frozen snows.
Oh, the blinding beauty of that House of God!—
Even the glittering bar at Jock McKay's,
Tinkling with goblets of fiery devil's-spit,
With dazzling vials and many-looking mirrors,
Seemed lead against the silver of the mission.

I hear again the chanting holy-men,
The agents of the white man's Mighty Spirit,
Making their talks with strong, smooth-moving tongues:

"Hear! Hear ye, men of a pagan faith!
Forsake the idols of the heathen fathers,
The too-many ghosts that walk upon the earth;
For there lie pain and sorrow, yea, and death!

"Hear! Hear ye, men of a pagan faith!
And grasp the friendly hands we offer you
In kindly fellowship, warm hands and tender,
Yea, hands that ever give and never take.
Forswear the demon-charms of medicine men;
Shatter the drums of conjuring Chée-sah-kée—
Yea, beyond these walls lie bitterness and death!

"Pagans!—ye men of a bastard birth!—bend;
Bow ye, proud heads, before this hallowed shrine!

Break!—break ye the knee beneath this roof,
For within this house lives God! Abide ye here!
Here shall your eyes behold His wizardry;
Here shall ye find an everlasting peace."

Ah, Joe the pagan, son of a bastard people,
Child of a race of vanquished, outlawed children,
Small wonder that you drooped your weary head,
Blinding your eyes to the suns of elder days;
For hungry bellies look for new fat gods,
And heavy heads seek newer, softer pillows.
With you again I hear the eerie chants
Floating from out the primal yesterdays—
The low sweet song of the doctor's flute, the slow
Resonant boom of the basswood water-drum,
The far voice of the fathers, calling, calling.
I see again the struggle in your eyes—
The hunted soul of a wild young grouse, afraid,
Trembling beneath maternal wings, yet lured
By the shrill whistle of the wheeling hawk.
I see your shuffling limbs, hesitant, faltering
Along the aisle—the drag of old bronzed hands
Upon your moccasined feet, the forward tug
Of others, soft and white, and very tender;
One forward step . . . another . . . a quick look back!—
Another step . . . another . . . and lo! the eyes
Flutter and droop before a flaming symbol,
The strong knees break before a blazoned altar
Glimmering its tapestries in the candle-light,
The high head beaten down and bending before
New wonder-working images of gold.

And thus the black-robes brought you into the house
Wherein they kept their God, a house of logs,
Square-hewn, and thirty feet by forty. They strove
To put before you food and purple trappings—
Oh, how they walked you up and down in the vestry
Proudly resplendent in your white man's raiment,
Glittering and gorgeous, the envy of your tribe:
Your stiff silk hat, your scarlet sash, your shoes
Shining and squeaking gloriously with newness!
Yet even unto the end—those blood-stained nights
Of the sickness-on-the-lung; that bitter day
On the Barking-rock, when I packed you down from
camp
At Split-hand Falls to the fort at Sleepy-eye;
While, drop by drop, your life went trickling out,
As sugar-sap that drips on the birch-bark bucket
And finally chills in the withered maple heart
At frozen dusk: even unto the end—
When the mission doctor, framed by guttering candles,
Hollowly tapped his hooked-horn finger here
And there upon your bony breast, like a wood-bird
Pecking and drumming on a rotten trunk—
Even unto this end I never knew
Which part of you was offering the holy prayers—
The chanting mouth, or the eyes that gazed beyond
The walls to a far land of windy valleys.
And sometimes, when your dry slow lips were moving
To perfumed psalms, I could almost, almost see
Your pagan soul aleap in the fire-light, naked,
Shuffling along to booming medicine-drums,
Shaking the flat black earth with moccasined feet,

Dancing again—back among the jangling
Bells and the stamping legs of gnarled old men—
Back to the fathers calling, calling across
Dead winds from the dim gray years.

O high-flying eagle,
Whose soul, wheeling among the sinuous winds,
Has known the molten glory of the sun,
The utter calm of dusk, and in the evening
The lullabies of moonlit mountain waters!—
The black-priests locked you in their House of God,
Behind great gates swung tight against the frightened
Quivering aspens, whispering perturbed in council,
And muttering as they tapped with timid fists
Upon the doors and strove to follow you
And hold you; tight against the uneasy winds
Wailing among the balsams, fumbling upon
The latch with fretful fingers; tight against
The crowding stars who pressed their troubled faces
Against the windows. In honest faith and zeal,
The black-robes put you in a box of God,
To swell the broken chorus of amens
And hallelujahs; to flutter against the door,
Crippled of pinion, bruised of head; to beat
With futile flying against the gilded bars;
To droop, to dream a little, and to die.

II: Whistling Wings

Shing-ób, companion of my old wild years
In the land of K'tchée-gah-mée, my good right arm
When we battled bloody-fisted in the storms
And snows with rotting scurvy, with hunger raw
And ravenous as the lusting tongues of wolves—
My Joe, no longer will the ghostly mountains
Echo your red-lunged laughters in the night;
The gone lone days when we communed with God
In the language of the waterfall and wind
Have vanished with your basswood water-drum.

Do you recall our cruise to Flute-reed Falls?
Our first together—oh, many moons ago—
Before the curés built the village mission?
How, banked against our camp-fire in the bush
Of sugar-maples, we smoked kin-ník-kin-ník,
And startled the somber buttes with round raw songs,
With wails that mocked the lynx who cried all night
As if her splitting limbs were torn with pain
Of a terrible new litter? How we talked
Till dawn of the Indian's Keétch-ie Má-ni-dó,
The Mighty Spirit, and of the white man's God?—
Don't you remember dusk at Cold-spring Hollow?—
The beaver-pond at our feet, its ebony pool
Wrinkled wih silver, placid, calm as death,
Save for the fitful chug of the frog that flopped

His yellow jowls upon the lily-pad,
And the quick wet slap of the tails of beaver hurrying
Homeward across the furrowing waters, laden
With cuttings of tender poplar . . . down in the swale
The hermit-thrush who spilled his rivulet
Of golden tones into the purple seas
Of gloam among the swamps . . . and in the East,
Serene against the sky—do you remember?—
Slumbering Mont du Père, shouldering its crags
Through crumpled clouds, rose-flushed with after-glow . . .
And dew-lidded dusk that slipped among the valleys
Soft as a blue wolf walking in thick wet moss.
How we changed our ribald song for simple talk! . . .

"My frien', Ah-déek, you ask-um plenty hard question:
Ugh! w'ere Keétch-ie Má-ni-dó he live?
W'ere all dose Eenzhun spirits walk and talk?
Me—I dunno! . . . Mebbe . . . mebbe over here,
In beaver-pond, in t'rush, in gromping bullfrog;
Mebbe over dere, he's sleeping in dose mountain. . . .

Sh-sh-sh! . . . Look!—over dere—look, my frien'!
On Mont du Père—he's moving little! . . . ain't?
Under dose soft blue blanket she's falling down
On hill and valley! Somebody—somebody's dere!
In dose hill of Mont du Père, sleeping . . . sleeping . . ."

And when the fingers of the sun, lingering,
Slipped gently from the marble brow of the glacier

Pillowed among the clouds, blue-veined and cool,
How, one by one, like lamps that flicker up
In a snow-bound hamlet in the valley, the stars
Lighted their candles mirrored in the waters . . .
And floating from the hills of Sleepy-eye,
Soft as the wings of dusty-millers flying,
The fitful syllables of the Baptism River
Mumbling among its caverns hollowly,
Shouldering its emerald sweep through cragged cascades
In a flood of wafted foam, fragile, flimsy
As luna-moths fluttering on a pool . . .

"You hear dat, Caribou? . . . somebody's dere! . . .
Ain't?—in dose hills of Mont du Père—sleeping.
Sh-sh-sh! You hear dose far 'way Flute-reed Falls?
Somebody's dere in Mont du Père, sleeping . . .
Somebody he's in dere de whole night long . . .
And w'ile he's sleep, he's talking little . . . talking . . ."

Hush!—don't you hear K'tchée-gah-mée at midnight?—
That stretched far out from the banks of Otter-slide
To the dim wet rim of the world—North, East, West?—
The Big-water, calm, thick-flecked with the light of stars
As the wind-riffled fur of silver fox in winter . . .
The shuffle of the sands in the lapsing tide . . .
The slow soft wash of waters on the pebbles . . .

"Sh-sh-sh! . . . Look Ah-déek!—on K'tchée-gah-mée!

Somebody—somet'ing he's in dere . . . ain't? . .
He's sleep w'ere black Big-water she's deep . . . Ho!
In morning he's jump up from hees bed and race
Wit' de wind; tonight he's sleeping . . . rolling little—
Dreaming about hees woman . . . rolling . . . sleeping . . ."

And later—you recall?—beyond the peaks
That tusked the sky like fangs of a coyote snarling,
The full-blown mellow moon that floated up
Like a liquid-silver bubble from the waters,
Serenely, till she pricked her delicate film
On the slender splinter of a cloud, melted,
And trickled from the silver-dripping edges.
Oh, the splendor of that night! . . . the Twin-fox stars
That loped across the pine-ridge . . . Red Ah-núng,
Blazing from out the cavern of the gloom
Like the smouldering coal in the eye of carcajou . . .
The star-dust in the valley of the sky,
Flittering like glow-worms in a reedy meadow! . . .

"*Somebody's dere . . . He's walk-um in dose cloud . . .*
You see-um? Look! He's mak'-um for hees woman
De w'ile she sleep, dose t'ing she want-um most—
Blue dress for dancing! You see, my frien'? . . . ain't?
He's t'rowing on de blanket of dose sky
Dose plenty-plenty handfuls of w'ite stars;
He's sewing on dose plenty teet' of elk,
Dose shiny looking-glass and plenty beads.
Somebody's dere . . . somet'ing he's in dere . . ."

Thus the green moons went—and many many winters.
Yet we held together, Joe, until our day
Of falling leaves, like two split sticks of bur-oak
Lashed tight with buckskin buried in the bark.
Do you recollect our last long cruise together,
To Hollow-bear, on our line of marten-traps?—
When cold Bee-bóan, the Winter-maker, hurdling
The rim-rock ridge, shook out his snowy hair
Before him on the wind and heaped up the hollows?—
Flanked by the drifts, our lean-to of toboggans,
Our bed of pungent balsam, soft as down
From the bosom of a whistling swan in autumn . . .
Our steaming sledge-dogs buried in the snow-bank,
Nuzzling their snouts beneath their tented tails,
And dreaming of the paradise of dogs . . .
Our fire of pine-boughs licking up the snow,
And tilting at the shadows in the coulee . . .
And you, rolled warm among the beaver-pelts,
Forgetful of your sickness-on-the-lung,
Of the fever-pains and coughs that racked your bones—
You, beating a war song on your drum,
And laughing as the scarlet-moccasined flames
Danced on the coals and billowed up the sky.

Don't you remember? . . . the snowflakes drifting down
Thick as the falling petals of wild plums . . .
The clinker-ice and the scudding fluff of the whirlpool
Muffling the summer-mumblings of the brook . . .
The turbulent waterfall protesting against
Such early winter-sleep, like a little boy
Who struggles with the calamity of slumber,

Knuckling his leaden lids and his tingling nose
With a pudgy fist, and fretfully flinging back
His snowy covers with his petulant fingers.
Out on the windy barrens restless bands
Of caribou, rumped up against the gale,
Suddenly breaking before the rabid blast,
Scampering off like tumbleweeds in a cyclone . . .
The low of bulls from the hills where worried moose,
Nibbling the willows, the wintergreens, the birches,
Were yarding up in the sheltering alder-thicket . . .
From the cedar wind-break, the bleat of calves wedged warm
Against the bellies of their drowsy cows . . .
And then the utter calm . . . the wide white drift
That lay upon the world as still and ghastly
As the winding-sheet of death . . . the sudden snap
Of a dry twig . . . the groan of sheeted rivers
Beating with naked hands upon the ice . . .
The brooding night . . . the crackle of cold skies . . .

"Sh-sh-sh! . . . Look, my frien'—somebody's dere!
Ain't? . . . over dere? He's come from Land-of-Winter!
Wit' quilt he's cover-um up dose baby mink,
Dose cub, dose wild arbutus, dose jump-up-Johnny . . .
He's keep hees chil'ens warm for long, long winter . . .
Sh-sh-sh! . . . Somebody's dere on de w'ite savanne!
Somebody's dere! . . . He's walk-um in de timber . . .
He's cover-um up hees chil'ens, soft . . . soft . . ."

And later, when your bird-claw fingers rippled

Over the holes of your cedar Bée-bee-gwún
Mellowly in a tender tune, how the stars,
Like little children trooping from their teepees,
Danced with their nimble feet across the sky
To the running-water music of your flute . . .
And how, with twinkling heels they scurried off
Before the Northern Light swaying, twisting,
Spiralling like a slender silver smoke
On the thin blue winds, and feeling out among
The frightened starry children of the sky . . .

"Look!—in de Land-of-Winter—somet'ing's dere!
Somebody—he's reaching out hees hand!—for me!
Ain't? . . . For me he's waiting. Somebody's dere!
Somebody he's in dere, waiting . . . waiting . . ."

Don't you remember?—the ghostly silence, splintered
At last by a fist that cracked the hoary birch,
By a swift black fist that shattered the brittle air,
Splitting it into a million frosty fragments . . .
And dreary Northwind, coughing in the snow,
Spitting among the glistening sheeted pines,
And moaning on the barrens among the bones
Of gaunt white tamaracks mournful and forlorn . . .

"Sh-sh-sh-sh! . . . My Caribou! Somebody's dere!
He's crying . . . little bit crazy in dose wind . . .
Ain't? . . . You hear-um . . . far 'way . . . crying
Lak my old woman w'en she's lose de baby
And no can find-um—w'en she's running everyw'ere,
Falling in snow, talking little bit crazy,

Calling and crying for shees little boy . . .
Sh-sh-sh! . . . Somet'ing's dere—you hear-um? . . .
ain't?
Somebody—somebody's dere, crying . . . crying . . ."

Then from the swale, where shadows pranced grotesquely
Solemn, like phantom puppets on a string,
A cry—pointed, brittle, perpendicular—
As startling as a thin stiff blade of ice
Laid swift and sharp on fever-burning flesh:
The tremulous wail of a lonely shivering wolf,
Piercing the world's great heart like an icy sword . . .

"Look! . . . Quick!—Ah-déek! . . . Somebody's dere!
Ain't? . . . He's come—he's come for me—for me!
Me—me, I go! . . . . . My Caribou—
Dose fire—dose fire she's going out—she's cold . . .
T'row—t'row on dose knots of pine . . . Mee-gwétch!
And pull 'way from dose flame—dose pan of sourdough,
If you want eat—in de morning—damn-good flapjack.

"Sh-sh-sh-sh! Somet'ing's dere! . . . You hear-um?
ain't? . . .
Somebody—somebody's dere, calling . . . calling . . .
I go . . . . . I go—me! . . . . . me . . . . . I go . . . ."

III: Talking Waters

O eagle whose whistling wings have known the lift
Of high mysterious hands, and the wild sweet music
Of big winds among the ultimate stars,
The black-robes put you in a box of God,
Seeking in honest faith and holy zeal
To lay upon your lips new songs, to swell
The chorus of amens and hallelujahs.
O bundle of copper bones tossed in a hole,
Here in the place-of-death—God's-fenced-in-ground!—
Beneath these put-in-pines and waxen lilies,
They placed you in a crimson gash in the hillside,
Here on a bluff above the Sleepy-eye,
Where the Baptism River, mumbling among the canyons,
Shoulders its flood through crooning waterfalls
In a mist of wafted foam fragile as petals
Of windflowers blowing across the green of April;
Where ghosts of wistful leaves go floating up
In the rustling blaze of autumn, like silver smokes
Slenderly twisting among the thin blue winds;
Here in the great gray arms of Mont du Père,
Where the shy arbutus, the mink, and the Johnny-jump-up
Huddle and whisper of a long, long winter;
Where stars, with soundless feet, come trooping up

To dance to the water-drums of white cascades—
Where stars, like little children, go singing down
The sky to the flute of the wind in the willow-tree—
Somebody—somebody's there . . . O Pagan Joe . . .
Can't you see Him? as He moves among the mountains?
Where dusk, dew-lidded, slips among the valleys
Soft as a blue wolf walking in thick wet moss?
Look!—my friend!—at the breast of Mont du Père! . . .
Sh-sh-sh-sh! . . . Don't you hear His talking waters? . . .
Soft in the gloom as broken butterflies
Hovering above a somber pool . . . Sh-sh-sh-sh!
Somebody's there . . . in the heart of Mont du Père . . .
Somebody—somebody's there, sleeping . . . sleeping . . .

PART II

GREEN ALTARS

IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS:

Shoshone National Forest
Jackson's Hole
Upper Yellowstone River
Absaroka Range

WIND IN THE PINE

Oh, I can hear you, God, above the cry
Of the tossing trees—
Rolling your windy tides across the sky,
And splashing your silver seas
Over the pine,
To the water-line
Of the moon.
Oh, I can hear you, God,
Above the wail of the lonely loon—
When the pine-tops pitch and nod—
Chanting your melodies
Of ghostly waterfalls and avalanches,
Swashing your wind among the branches
To make them pure and white.

Wash over me, God, with your piney breeze,
And your moon's wet-silver pool;
Wash over me, God, with your wind and night,
And leave me clean and cool.

TETON MOUNTAIN

She walks alone against the dusky sky,
  With something of the manner of a queen—
Her gesturing peaks, imperious and high;
  Her snowy brow, serene.

Under her feet, a tapestry of pine;
  Veiling her marble figure, purple haze,
Draped with a scarf of clouds at timber-line,
  In a billowy silken maze.

And in the moonlight a spangled necklace shakes
  And shimmers silver-blue upon her shoulders—
A fragile thread of crinkling brooks and lakes
  In the glimmering ice and boulders.

Among her eagle-winged and starry host
  Of lovers, like an austere virgin nun,
She broods—yielding a moment at the most,
  To the lips of the amorous sun.

MESA-MIST

When the passion of the day is done,
And the weary sun,
Lingering above the calm plateau
And mesa-waters, stains
The cottonwoods and sleeping cranes
With afterglow,
Day keeps a fleeting tryst
With Night in the mesa-mist.
When her crimson arm embraces
The clouds and plains
No more, spent Day slips quietly to rest
On a ghostly breast—
And nothing remains,
Save in the twilit places,
The ghosts of rains
And columbines whose wistful faces
Droop where the purple-pollened fir
Tinctures the dusk with lavender.

THE RED DRAGOON

I

Among the brittle needles of the pine,
A crackling ember, casually flung—
Spitting in the tinder of the soil . . .
Writhing crimson vipers
Redly licking at the leaves
With flickering venomous tongues,
Bellying into the amorous wind,
And sinking red tusks in the flank of the night . . .

II

Lo! blazing mane and streaming bridle,
Bursting out of the lurid hills,
A stallion,
A livid-crimson stallion,
A lightning-pinioned stallion,
Crashing out of the billowing smoke
On a flaming crimson trail.
A ghastly shriek in the canyon,
An echoing moan in the pines,
A wild red rush of flying feet,
And a hand at the charger's bit.
A flame-shod foot in the stirrup,

A phantom hand on the reins—
And vaulting into the saddle,
A rider in scarlet,
A swaggering rider in scarlet,
The ghost of a Red Dragoon!

A war-brawling wild cavalier,
With a cackle sardonic and grim,
A bite in his whistling arrows,
And a blight in his scorching breath.
Careering he charges the timber
With clouds of resin-hot lances,
And he shouts a demoniac laughter
When his blood-bleary eyes behold,
Scurrying out of the riotous hills
A rabble of shadowy things—
Oh, the clatter of whistling deer,
The patter of feet in the rushes,
The bleat of the panting fawn!—
Flung out of the timber like leaves,
Like burning leaves in the wind
Whirled over the hills and the valleys
And out to the fringes of night . . .

A bloody-lipped red cavalier!
A blasphemous dread cavalier!
Galloping into the cloud-templed hills
With a ribald song in his mouth,
With a curse for the gray-bearded firs
That complain of his searing breath—
Sundering their boles with a molten fist,

Cleaving their suppliant branches,
With a jeer as they go to a thundering doom
Enshrouded in bellowing flame,
As they wing their gray souls
On the spiralling smoke
Up to the ultimate sky.
Galloping over tumultuous clouds
To tilt at the livid-lipped stars;
Galloping on through the turbulent night
And over the rim of the world . . .

III

Oh, the toll of the rider in scarlet!
The toll of the Red Dragoon!
Windrows of charred black bones
Strewn over a pocked and gutted land;
Skeletons—once draped in the green
Of leaf and the silken sheen of moss—
Bare skeletons, bitter of laughter,
Clattering through long white nights—
Gray ghosts in a land of ravaged dead,
Playing the bow of the wind futilely
Over the once resonant fiddle,
Striving again to beguile old melodies,
Bemoaning the old sweet Aprils.
O, fiddlers, scratching over the shattered box,
And scraping over the tattered strings,
Pray, conjure me a tune!—the low call
Of the last singing bird that is gone.

DUST

This much I know:
Under the bludgeonings of snow
And sleet and sharp adversity,
From high estate
The seemingly immortal tree
Shall soon or late
Go down to dust;
When a wild wet gust
Tumbles the gaunt debris
Down from the gashed plateau
And out upon the plain,
The dust shall go
Down with the rain;
Rivers are slow,
Rivers are fast,
But rivers and rains run down to the sea,
All rains go down to the sea at last.

Ho! shake the red bough,
And cover me now,
Cover me now with dreams,
With a blast
Of falling leaves, with the filtered gleams
Of the moon;

Shake the dead bough
And cover me now,
For soon
Rivers and rains shall go with me
Down to the vast infinity.

SWEETWATER RANGE

I was loping along in the Sweetwater Range,
When the shadowy clouds of sleep,
On the blue earth had settled like raven's wings,
With a swift mysterious sweep.

The valley lay calm as a beaver-pond
When the hunter's moon hangs low,
And the hills were soft as the velvet sod
Under an antelope doe.

Serene overhead in the dusky blue,
A single star through the night
Glowed like a candle held by God
As a friendly beacon-light;

A flame in the window of His vast house,
Beckoning out to me—
I could almost see Him peering down,
As He waited expectantly.

So I flung Him a couple of friendly songs,
As I cantered a lonely mile:
Swing Low Sweet Chariot, Old Black Joe,
Jordan, and Beautiful Isle.

For the singing of psalms my voice was raw—
I was never a parson's pet;
And the tremolo wail of a shivering wolf
Made it a strange duet.

But hard on the echoes—from Avalanche Peak,
Where the Yellowrock Cataract spills—
I heard Him sing back to me clear as a bell
In the frosty dawn of the hills.

LEAVE ME TO MY OWN

Oh, leave me to my own;
Unglorified—perchance unknown,
One of a nameless band
Of gipsy cloud and silent butte and fir.
Oh, let me stand
Against the whipping wind, in the lavender
Of dusk, like a mighty limber-pine
At timber-line—
Unyielding, stiff,
Unbent of head
Among the ageless dead—
One with the mountain's cliff
And the imperturbable stone.

And when the winter gales intone
Among my boughs a dread
And melancholy sweep
Of song, and some mysterious hand
Brushes my heart
In a mournful melody, weep
No tear for me, nor moan—
Pray, stand apart
From me, and leave me to my own;
For in the high blue valleys of this land,
When the afterglow

Lingers among the glaciers, I shall know
Again the calm
Of dusk, the dewy balm
Of sleep, release
From pain—and utter peace.

Oh, leave me to the wild companionship
Of firs that toss
In the windy night and drip
Their wild wet rains upon the moss;
To the columbine
That strives to slip
Shyly among my roots and tip
Its sparkling wine
Upon my grassy shrine;
To the brotherhood
Of bending skies bestrown
With stars above the soundless solitude—
Of waterfalls that fling upon the night
A stony broken music from their height—
Oh, leave me to my own.

MARCHING PINES

Up the drifted foothills,
  Like phantoms in a row,
The ragged lines of somber pines
  Filed across the snow.

Down the gloomy coulees
  The burdened troopers went,
Snowy packs upon their backs—
  Bowed of head and bent.

Up the cloudy mountains,
  A mournful singing band,
Marching aimless to some nameless,
  Undiscovered land.

YELLOW MOON

O yellow moon,
Drifting across the night
As a rakish pirate brig,
Tattered of rig
And ghostly white,
Goes floating down the black lagoon
Of a dead sea—
O pirate moon,
Out of your hatch and hold
Pour down your buccaneering beams,
Your pirates, swaggering and bold,
And bid them capture me;
O ghostly moon,
Carry me out to the farthest sweep
Of the slow tides of sleep;
Abandon me upon the gold
Of some enchanted strand,
Where the blue-flame comber gleams
And breaks upon the sand;
Oh, sail with me to a far land
Of unremembered dreams.

TIMBER-LINE CEDAR

Ho! patriarchal cedar, torn
By bitter winds, and weather-worn,
How came your countenance so sour,
Disconsolate, and dour?

In hermit-souls I've never seen
So gnarled and dolorous a mien—
Such a mournful misanthrope
Bereft of faith and hope.

Can it be your figure spare
Is due to slender mountain-fare?
Your limbs awry with rheumatic pains
From chilling autumn rains?

How came the choler-twisted mouth?—
Wrangling with the wind and drouth?
And how the beaten head and branch?—
Ruthless avalanche?

What! Within your scanty shade,
Sharing life with you, a blade!—
Sheltered by a withered root,
A lupine at your foot!

Deceiver! Holding in the bower
Of your breast a fragile flower,—
When every gesture seems to hint
A heart of solid flint!—

I know you now for what you are!—
A roguish beau, grown angular
And gruff, but still at heart quite gentle,
And highly sentimental.

WHOOPING CRANE

Oh, what a night it was for dreams:
  The bayou placid after rain;
The pensive moon, the silver gleams—
  And among the reeds, a crane.

Like a silver fountain fixed by frost,
  All night the stilted sleeping bird
In frozen winter-sleep was lost;
  Never a feather stirred.

LET ME FLOWER AS I WILL

God, let me flower as I will!
For I am weary of the chill
Companionship of waxen vines
And hothouse-nurtured columbines;
Oh, weary of the pruning-knife
That shapes my prim decorous life—
Of clambering trellises that hold me,
Of flawless patterned forms that mold me.

God, let me flower as I will!
A shaggy rambler on the hill!—
Familiar with April's growing pain
Of green buds bursting after rain.
Oh, let me hear among the sheaves
Of autumn, the song of wistful leaves,
The lullaby of the brook that dallies
Among the high blue mountain valleys.
And may my comrades be but these:
Birds on the bough, and guzzling bees
Among my blossoms, as they sup
On the dew in my silver-petaled cup.

God, let my parching roots go deep
Among the cold green springs, and keep
Firm grip upon the mossy edges

Of imperishable granite ledges,
That thus my body may withstand
Vast avalanche of snow and sand,
The trample of the years, the flail
Of whipping wind and bouncing hail.

And when December with its shroud
Of fallen snow and leaden cloud,
Shall find me in the holiday
Of slumber, shivering and gray
Against the sky—and in the end,
My somber days shall hold no friend
Save a whimpering wolf, and on the tree
A frozen bird—so may it be.
For in that day I shall have won
The glory of the summer sun;
My leaves, by windy fingers played,
An eerie music shall have made;
I shall have known in some far land
The tender comfort of a Hand,
And the liquid beauty of a Tongue
That finds its syllables among
Wild wind and waterfall and rill—
God, let me flower as I will!

OCTOBER SNOW

Swiftly the blizzard stretched a frozen arm
From out the hollow night—
Stripping the world of all her scarlet pomp,
And muffling her in white.

Dead white the hills; dead white the soundless plain;
Dead white the blizzard's breath—
Heavy with hoar that touched each woodland thing
With a white and silent death.

In inky stupor, along the drifted snow,
The sluggish river rolled—
A numb black snake caught lingering in the sun
By autumn's sudden cold.

INDIAN SUMMER

When I went down the butte to drink at dawn,
I saw a frozen lily by the spring,
A ragged stream-line rank of whistling swan,
And the swift flash of a willet's wing.

And now comes a hint of winter in the air:
Among the pensive valleys drifts a haze
Of dusty blue, and the quaking-asp lies bare
To the chill breath of hoary days.

Farewell, my mountain-ash and goldenrod,
For summer swoons in autumn's arms, and dies,
As the languid rivers drowse and the asters nod
Beneath the gray wind's lullabies.

Farewell, my fleet-foot antelope and doe;
Farewell, my wild companions of the hills—
Soon in your winter-slumber you will go
To a far land of singing rills.

Soon by the fire I'll sit with quiet dreams;
In the sinuous smoke, silver against the blue,
That floats above the dusky vales and streams,
My eyes will see the ghosts of you.

I'll ride my night-patrols upon the peak—
And the big wind among the firs, the lone
Wandering wolf, and the waterfall will speak
Of you in a language of their own.

We'll miss you, blue-eyed grass and laughing brook;
In the spring on some high mesa we'll confer,
And with shining eyes we'll trace your form, and look
For you when your snowy blankets stir.

Rest well, my comrades; know that while you sleep,
With eager hearts we'll listen for your song,
And through the night a patient watch we'll keep
For you—don't stay away too long.

DROUTH

The scorching embers of the sun
All month had smoldered on the land,
Until the lakes and marshes, one by one,
Were pools of glistering sand.

The pond-reeds rattled with each gasp
Of wind like brittle yellow bones;
Endless the pessimistic cricket's rasp
Among the crumbling stones.

The runnel, dribbling among the sheaves,
Ran thin as a fragile silver thread,
And Shoshone River rolled a stream of leaves
Along its blistered bed.

All day the sage, in dusty shrouds,
Sucked at the alkali in vain;
All night the mountains combed the scudding clouds
Desperately for rain.

FISHER OF STARS

My wild blood leaped as I watched the falling stars
Flash through the night and gleam,
Like spawning trout that hurtle the riffled bars
Of a dusky mountain stream.

Like quivering rainbow-trout that run in spring,
Arching the water-slides,—
Out of the limpid sky, in a wild wet fling,
They shook their crimson sides.

My sportsman's heart flamed up, as the fishes dashed
In school on shimmering school,
Through high cascades and waterfalls, and splashed
In the deep of a cloudy pool.

I fished that pond; I chose my longest line,
And cast with my supplest rod—
The one was a thing of dreams, oh, gossamer-fine;
The other a gift from God.

I flicked the Milky Way from edge to edge
With an iridescent fly;
I whipped the polar rapids, and every ledge
And cut-bank in the sky.

To the Pleiades I cast with my willowy pole;
And I let my line run out
To the farthest foamy cove and skyey hole—
And I raised a dozen trout.

And every time one struck my slender hook,
He shattered the trembling sea,
With a sweep of his shivering silver fin, and he shook
A silver rain on me;

My line spun out, my fly-rod bent in twain,
As over the sky he fought;
My fingers bled, my elbows throbbed with pain—
But my fishing went for naught.

I landed never a one; my line and hackle
Were none too subtle and fine;
For angling stars one wants more delicate tackle,—
A more cunning hand than mine.

ALKALI POOL

In the golden setting of the butte it lay,
Deep emerald of hue;
In the copper filigree of dying day
It gleamed a sapphire-blue.

And yet its stagnant waters held a hint
Of alkali and lead—
And the limpid spring seemed baleful with the glint
Of the stone in a serpent's head.

OLD OAK

Oh, you and I, old oak, beneath the leaden skies
Of waning autumn, shall hold our ways together;
For the hermit-thrush departs, and our fickle summer flies
Before the hoary breath of sterner weather.

Old oak forlorn and mournful, together we shall know
A calm white death—the cold moon riding by,
The silent winter-sleep beneath the soundless snow,
The still companionship of starry sky.

O mournful tree, why yearn with suppliant arms to hold
The migrant bird? Why weep with windy grief?
Why cling with great gaunt hands to the hollow charms, the cold
And faded love of the last palsied leaf?

Mourn not; for we shall know again the summer sun,
New greener leaves, the vagrant bird, and the gleams
Of bees that nuzzle the buds when the rains of April run.
Grieve not; for now is the time for quiet dreams.

LOOK FOR ME

When the sinking sun
Goes down to the sea,
And the last day is done,
Oh, look for me
Beneath no shimmering monument,
Nor tablet eloquent
With stiff decorous eulogy;
Nor yet in the gloom
Of a chipped and chiseled tomb.

But when the pregnant bud shall burst
With April's sun, and bloom
Upon the bough—
Look for me now,
In the sap of the first
Puccoon whose fragile root,
Bruised by the rain,
Has left a crimson stain
Upon the cedar-glade.

Oh, look for me then,
For I shall come again,
In the leopard-lily's shoot,

And in the green wet blade
Of the peppergrass.
When the warm winds pass
Over the waking rills,
And the wild arbutus spills
Its fragrance on the air,—
Look for me then—
Asleep in a ferny glen
High in the hills,
Deep in the dew-drenched maiden-hair;
I shall be waiting, waiting there.

PART III

RED GODS

Poems of Indian Theme

IN THE LAND OF THE CHIPPEWAS:

Superior National Forest
Upper Mississippi River
Red Lake Indian Forest
Pigeon River Reservation

THUNDERDRUMS *

An Indian War-medicine Dance

I

THE DRUMMERS SING:

Beat on the buckskin, beat on the drums,
Hi! Hi! Hi! for the Thunderbird comes;
His eyes burn red with the blood of battle;
His wild wings roar in the medicine rattle.
Thunderbird-god, while our spirits dance,
Tip with your lightning the warrior's lance;
On shafts of wind, with heads of flame,
Build for us arrows that torture and maim;
Ho! may our ironwood war-clubs crash
With a thunderbolt head and a lightning flash.
Hi! Hi! Hi! hear the Cut-throat's doom
As our wild bells ring and our thunderdrums boom.

* For supplementary notes on this poem and the remaining poems in Part III, see Appendix, pages 75-88.

II

Double-Bear Dances

Hi! Hi! Hi
My wild feet fly,
For I follow the track
Of a cowardly pack;
Footprints here,
Footprints there,—
Enemies near!—
Taint in the air!
Signs on the sod!
Ho! the Thunderbird-god
Gives me the eye
Of a hawk in the sky!—
Beat, beat on the drums,
For the Thunderbird comes.
Ho! Ho!
Ho! Ho!

III

Jumping-River Dances

Ho! hear me shout—
A Pucker-skin scout
With a nose that is keen
For winds unclean.
Look! Look! Look!
At the distant nook,
Where the hill-winds drift
As the night-fogs lift:
Ten smokes I see
Of the Cut-throat Sioux—
Ten ghosts there will be,—
Ten plumes on my coup;
For my arms grow strong
With my medicine-song,
And a Pucker-skin scout
Has a heart that is stout.
Beat, beat on the drums,
For the Thunderbird comes.
Háh-yah-ah-háy!
Háh-yah-ah-háy!

IV

Ghost-Wolf Dances

Ho! Ho! Ho!
In the winds that blow
From yonder hill,
When the night is still,
What do I hear
With my Thunderbird ear?
Down from the river
A gray wolf's wail?
Coyotes that quiver
And slink the tail?—
Ugh! enemies dying,—
And women crying!—
For Cut-throat men—
One, two . . . nine, ten.
Ho! Ho! Ho!
The Spirit-winds blow,—
Beat, beat on the drums
For the Thunderbird comes.
Ah-hah-háy!
Ah-hah-háy!

V

Iron-Wind Dances:

Over and under
The shaking sky,
The war-drums thunder
When I dance by!—
Ho! a warrior proud,
I dance on a cloud,
For my ax shall feel
The enemy reel;
My heart shall thrill
To a bloody kill,—
Ten Sioux dead
Split open of head!—
Look! to the West!—
The sky-line drips,—
Blood from the breast!
Blood from the lips!
Ho! when I dance by,
The war-drums thunder
Over and under
The shaking sky.
Beat, Beat on the drums,
For the Thunderbird comes.
Wuh!
Wuh!

VI

THE DRUMMERS SING:

Beat on the buckskin, beat on the drums,
Hi! Hi! Hi! for the Thunderbird comes;
His eyes glow red with the lust for battle,
And his big wings roar in the medicine-rattle.
Thunderbird-god, while our spirits dance,
Tip with your lightning the warrior's lance;
On shafts of wind, with heads of flame,
Build for us arrows that torture and maim;
Ho! may our ironwood war-clubs crash
With a thunderbolt head and a lightning flash.
Hi! Hi! Hi! hear the Cut-throat's doom,
As our wild bells ring and our thunderdrums boom.

INDIAN SLEEP-SONG

Zhoo . . . zhoo, zhoo!
My little brown chief,
The bough of the willow
Is rocking the leaf;
The sleepy wind cries
To you, close your eyes,—
O little brown chief,
Zhoo . . . zhoo, zhoo!

Koo . . . . koo, koo!
My little brown bird,
A wood-dove was dreaming
And suddenly stirred;
A brown mother-dove,
Dreaming of love,—
O little brown bird,
Koo . . . . koo, koo!

Sh . . . . . sh, sh!
My little brown fawn,
The snowflakes are falling,—
The Winter-men yawn;
They cover with white

Their children to-night,—
O little brown fawn,
Sh . . . . . sh, sh!

Hoo . . . . hoo, hoo!
My little brown owl,
Yellow-eye frightens
Bad spirits that prowl;
For you she will keep
A watch while you sleep,—
O little brown owl,
Hoo . . . . hoo, hoo!

Zhoo . . . zhoo, zhoo!
O leaf in the breeze.
Koo . . . . kōo, koo!
Shy bird in the trees.
Sh . . . . . sh, sh!
O snow-covered fawn.
Hoo . . . . hoo, hoo!
Sleep softly till dawn.

TO A DEAD PEMBINA WARRIOR

Killed by Indians in hostile territory and, at his request, given a tree-burial: i. e., wrapped in a bundle of birchbark and placed in the crotch of a tree.

O warrior-soul, afloat
Upon the seas of night
In your ghostly birchen boat,
Anchored upon the black limb,
And etched against the white
Of the broken hunter's moon,—
O spirit, dark and dim,
Draped with festoon
Of moss, and shielded by lancing pines
That ring their ragged lines
Around the somber swamp,—
Sleep without fear in your birchen shroud,
Sleep with a heart secure and proud
In your ghostly burial pomp.
Know that the iron-hearted mountain-ash
Lifts you with mighty arms
Up to the proud flash
Of the moon, holds you high
In the unconquered sky,
Secure in a starry cache,

Safe from the harms
Of the little peoples of the earth.
Through soundless nights, with ghostly mirth,
Echoing your crimson scalping-cry
From peak to peak,
The lonely wolf will speak
Of you and your many bloody wars.
When white Bee-bóan shall heap
His snowy avalanche—
Soft as the down of the Canada goose—
In tufted drifts and bars
On the black branch
To keep you warm in winter-sleep,
The wild feet of the stars
Mirrored upon the frozen snow,
Will dance for you, row on row;
And when the hoary spruce
Bends on your head,
To whisper lullabies, to weep
Sweet songs for the dead—
Lo! out of the white deep
Of night the winter wind will sweep
Down on your birchen bed,
To wrap its arms about your clay,
To carry you away
To the land of your desires,
To the country whence you came
Like a flame,
Back to the country of your sires,
To a land of friendly council fires.

MEDALS AND HOLES

An Indian Council Talk

Boo-zhóo nee-chée! Me—Yellow-Otter,
I'm going mak'-um big-talk, 'Spector Jone'.

Look-see!—on chest I'm got-um golden medal;
Got-um woman on medal! Ho!—good medal!

Me—I'm go on Washin'ton long tam' ago;
Me—I'm tell-um Keétch-ie O-gi-má, dose big w'ite chief:
"Eenzhuns[1] no lak'-um Eenzhun rese'vation;
No good! She's too much jack-pine, sand, and swamp."
Big-chief, him say: "Ó-zah-wah-kíg, you be good boy!
Go back to rese'vation. You tell-um tribe
If Eenzhun stay on rese'vation, Washin'ton gov'ment
Give-um all de Eenzhuns plenty payments,
Give-um plenty good hats and suits o' clothes
My heart is good to you; you damned good Eenzhun.
Me—I'm stick-um dis golden medal on your chest."
Ho! I'm walk-um home. I got-um medal—look-see!

But no got-um plenty good hats and suits o' clothes;
No got-um every year; only every two year.
Clothes no good! Look-see! Got-um clothes on now—

[1] *Indians.*

No good! Got-um holes in legs—plenty-big holes
Wit' not much clot' around; and too much buttons off.
Gov'ment clothes she's coming every two year—
Long tam' between, too much—wit' too much holes.

Before de w'ite man come across big-water,
In olden tam', de Eenzhun got-um plenty clothes;
He mak'-um plenty suits wit' skins,—no holes.
Even Shing-oós, dose weasel, Wah-bóos, dose rabbit,
Dey got-um better luck—two suits every year—
Summer, brown-yellow suit; winter, w'ite suit—
No got-um holes.
Wau-goósh and Nee-gíg, dose fox and otter,
Shang-wáy-she, dose mink, Ah-méek, dose beaver,
Dey get-um plenty clothes, each year two suits—
Summer, t'in clothes; winter, t'ick fur clothes—
No got-um holes.
Ah-deék, dose caribou, dose deer, and moose,
In spring dey t'row away deir horns;
In summer dey get-um nice new hat—
No got-um holes.
Me—I'm big-smart man, smarter dan weasel,
Smarter dan moose and fox and beaver—
I got-um golden medal on chest from big-knife chief;
Me—I'm only got-um one suit clothes
In two year—no-good clothes, no-good hats!
'Spector Jone', you tell-um our big-knife Grandfader, so:
"Yellow-Otter no got-um plenty good clothes;
No got-um silk-black hat, no stove-pipes hat;
Him got-um plenty-much holes in Washin'ton pants."

Tell-um holes in pants now big, plenty-big—
Bigger dan golden medal on chest!

So much—dat's enough.

How! How!
Kay-gét! Kay-gét!
Ho! Ho! Ho!

FIRE-BENDER TALKS

An Indian Council Talk

Fire-Bender wants talk-um now
On Treaty of E'ghteen E'ghty-nine.

Major Rice, de gov'ment man,
Him scratch on treaty, so:
"When Eenzhun give-um up hees land,
Wherever Eenzhun go and live,
Den Washin'ton mak'-it good for him
So he can hunt all-tam' lak in olden tam'."

Comes now Minnesota game-warden,
Police of deer and moose and fishing;
He got-um silver star on chest,
He got-um damn big mout'.
He tak'-um on jail two Eenzhun boy
She's kill wan deer, and den he say:
" 'Cheebway, you no can hunt-um moose
Or deer outside de hunting season;
You kill dose wásh-kish, dose w'ite-tail deer,
In summer, you pay-um fifty irons;
Dat's 'gainst de big-knife's law!
In Treaty E'ghteen E'ghty-nine

De 'Cheebway scratch-um 'way deir hunting rights."
'Spector Taylo', you be smart man,—
You t'ink dat Eenzhun she's damn-fool?
You t'ink she's scratch-um 'way hees grub!
You t'ink she's give-um 'way hees right for **live!**

Ugh! 'Cheebway no can live except
Wan way: on grub she's in de water
And animal she's on land.
Keétch-ie Má-ni-dó, Big-Spirit,
Mak'-it so de w'ite man get-um grub
By scratching ground wit' crazy-stick;
By making mud laugh up wit' plenty corn;
By digging hole in granite rock
And taking plenty copper-iron
Out of de guts of ground.
Same God He's mak'-um grub
For all dose big-knife w'ite man.
He's mak'-um grub for Eenzhuns;
He's mak'-um for Eenzhun all dose t'ing
She's jump in water and on de land:
He's mak'-um pickerel and w'itefish,
O-gáh, dose pike, and weé-bee-zhéen,
Dose skipjacks and silver tulibees;
He's mak'-um sturgeon and másh-ke-nón-zhay,
And all dose fish she's walking in de lake.
He's mak'-um deer and elk, she's running
Wild in de timber and big mush-keég;
He's mak'-um caribou and moose,
She's feed in de lily in de river.
Ho! same big má-ni-dó

He's mak'-um grub for big-knife chil'en
Mak'-um grub for Eenzhun chil'en.

'Spector Taylo', you ask-um warden
If she's forget-um dose olden treaty,
You ask-um if w'ite man mak'-um newer **treaty,**
Wit' God—if Big-Spirit scratch on paper so:
"Only de w'ite man, beginning now,
Belongs him de sea, de land, de sky,
And all dose fish and animal and bird
She's walk in de water, de ground, de air."
Mebbe—mebbe dose big-knife warden
She's got-um treaty-paper lak' dat! Ho!
Me—I lak' see—me—dose paper!

So much I say—no more.

Ho! Ho!
Kay-gét!

MAPLE-SUGAR CHANT

I

Hó-yo-hó-ho! . . . . . yo-ho!
Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo, big spirit of our brother,
Come thou and bless us, for the maple flows,
And the Moon-of-Sugar-Making is upon us.
The nights are white with frost; the days are yellow
With sunshine, and now the sap of the maple tree,
Humming the sugar-song, goes up the stem
With dancing feet. The gabbling geese come tumbling
Out of the wind and into the wet mush-kéeg
In clattering families; among the reeds
The fat old women-geese go chattering
Of winter-lands; and gathered on the shore,
Shouting with hearts glad to be home again,
The old men strut in council, and flutter and snort.
Ah-chée-dah-mó, the spluttering tail-up squirrel,
Pokes his blue whiskers from his hole in the oak,
And scurries up and down the swaying branches—
He runs in six directions, all over the earth,
Hurrying, looking everywhere for somebody,
Something he cannot find,—nor does he know
Why the green wet days should be so bitterly sweet.
Ho! the yellow birch throbs, for she knows the pain
of life,

Of swelling limbs and bursting buds; she stands
With naked arms stretched out to the warm gray rains,
With hungry arms that tremble for her lover,
For See-gwun, the Maker-of-little-children, who comes
With soft blue feet that rustle the fallen leaves!—
Hear thou the maple-water dripping, dripping,
The cool sweet-water dripping upon the birchbark!—
Ho! the Moon-of-Sugar-Making is upon us!

Hó-yo-hó-ho! . . . . . yo-ho!
Hear thou our prayers, O Brother, Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo!—
Hear, thou who hast made the flat green earth for us
To dance upon, who dost fold us in thy hands
Tenderly as a woman holds a broken bird
In winter, thou our Brother who hast hung the sun
Upon the sky to give us warmth and life,
And the wet moon to make us cool and clean;
Hear, thou who hast made the hills and the timber-beasts
That roam them, who hast made the sliding rivers
And silver fish that shiver in the pools—
That there might be wild meat for empty bellies;
Hear, thou who hast made cold rapids in the canyons,
Wild waterfalls, and springs in the cool green hollows—
That there might be sweet water for parching tongues;
Hear, thou who hast given us thy mother, All-Mother Earth,
That she might feed her children from her bosom—
Ah-yee! Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo, come thou on this night
With blessings as the maple-water flows;
Make thou a song to our heavy-breasted mother,

And pray thou that her children may not hunger,
For now is the night for maple-sugar feasting.

Hó-yo-hó-ho! . . . . . yo-ho!
From the long cold of winter moons, our eyes
Are deep, our hands like the bundled veins and talons
Of buzzard birds. Before the winter-winds
The moose have run to other lands for feeding;
The rabbits have vanished as the snow—a plague
Left a strange red sickness in their withered mouths.
Even old Gahg, the clumsy porcupine,
No longer finds his way to our roasting-pots,—
We boil his yellow bone-ribs many times—
Ugh! our teeth grow soft without strong meat to eat.

Ho! Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo, hear thou our many tears
Dropping among the dead leaves of winter;
Pray thou, and ask our grandmother, Waking-Earth,
To take us in her arms, to make us warm
With food, to hold us safe upon her bosom.
Our mouths go searching for her mighty breasts,
Where the maple-milk comes flowing from the trees,—
Ah-yee! Brother, pray thou now the Mother-One
To give us freely of her sugar-sàp,
The good sweet water of her bursting breasts–
For the Moon-of-Sugar-Making is upon us!
Hó-yo-hó-ho! . . . . . yo-ho!

II

And if the sap flows thin with water, our hearts
Will hold no bitterness; for we shall know
That long ago in thy wisdom thou didst decree
That our mother's milk might never be too thick—
Fearing that we should gather plenty sugar
With little labor and soon grow sick with food
And slow to move our legs, like glutted bear—
Ho! we are a faithful children of the soil;
We toil with eager hearts and patient hands.
And if our birchen baskets crack and leak
The gathered sap, our tongues will speak no evil;
We know that thou, our Brother, in thy love
For all the Otter-tails, didst whip the growing
Birch tree until the bark was cracked and cut
With round black stripes,—that our birchen pails might
leak
The golden sap, that thus all Indian children,
Laboring long with many steps, might never
Grow soft and fat with idling in the bush.
Ho! we are a faithful children of the soil;
We toil with eager hearts and patient backs.

Hi! Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo! Hear thou, O mighty one,
Who dost fold us in his tender hands as a woman
Holding a broken bird in the winter-wind,

Come thou and bless us on this night of feasting;
Pray thou our mother to take us in her arms,
To hold us warm upon her great brown bosom,
To give us freely of her maple-water,
The good sweet water of her swelling breasts.
And if we labor long, our lips will speak
No bitterness, for our arms are strong for hauling,
Eager for many buckets of sweet sap,
For sirup dancing its bubbles up and down
In the kettles, to the bubble-dancing song.
Ho! for we are a faithful children of the soil;
We toil with trusting hearts and patient fingers—
And now is the Moon-of-Maple-Sugar-Making!
Hó-yo-hó-ho! . . . . . yo-ho!

APPENDIX

The following supplementary notes concerning the poems of Indian theme in Part III, "RED GODS," may prove helpful to the reader who is unfamiliar with the American Indian by providing for the poems a background of Indian legends, customs, and traditions.

RED GODS

Although the life of the North American Indian is rich with poetic concepts, he has no special form of expression called poetry. His poetic thought may be discovered in his songs, his rituals, and his ceremonies, occasionally as a minor element in a feast or a chant, but generally as a vital part of the ceremony, suffusing it with color. Poetic beauty, sometimes simple and stark but very real, enfolds all his modes of expression, his songs and dances, his religious practices, his feasts and chants, his superstitions and folklore and legends. In a sense his poetry is implied, rather than expressed.

Obviously, a literal translation or a transcription of an Indian song or ceremony is inadequate. Few words may be uttered in the course of a medicine-dance lasting an hour; nevertheless, the event will be highly significant to those who comprehend the philosophy, the religion, and the psychology of the Indian, the spirit of his music, of his symbols, of his pantomime and his dancing.

I wish to emphasize the fact, therefore, that the poems in Part III, "RED GODS," are not translations or transcriptions; they are in no sense derivative. They are original poems in which I have sought to capture and to communicate something of the poetic beauty and the spiritual significance of Indian ceremonies—war dances,

lullabies, council-talks, and seasonal chants—as they are revealed to one whose kinship with the Indian, and whose experience with Indian life in its setting of mountain and forest, make him peculiarly responsive to Indian thought and feeling. I have not hesitated to depart greatly from the original ceremonies whenever it became necessary to set out the myth, the tradition, or the practice that gives point and poignance to a song. I have endeavored steadily, however, to keep true to the peculiarities of Indian idiom, expression, and philosophy, to the psychology of the Indian, and to his peculiar outlook upon life, and true to the genuine Indian type of to-day and of the past fifty years.

THUNDERDRUMS

Page 53

The ceremony upon which the poem, "Thunder-drums," is based illustrates the futility of translation. The poem is a broad interpretation of a war-medicine dance that was performed often in the old Indian fighting days by the Chippewas as a part of their preparations for war with the Sioux, their bitter enemies. This ancient war-dance has been preserved by some of the Chippewas and is performed occasionally by the Red Lake Chippewas and other equally remote Indians, even in these modern peaceful days.

While the Chippewa chiefs and braves danced in the ring, during the war-dance, the medicine-men made war-medicine; by means of their chants and strong medicines they would render the warriors immune from injury and death; they would invoke the aid of the powerful spirits and gods, especially of the Thunder-bird; and thus they would strengthen the fighting hearts of the braves for fearless struggles and for heroic deeds.

A war-dance may continue for hours; yet in the entire period no specific words may be uttered, with the exception of a defiant war-whoop, or an exultant "Ah-hah-háy!" or "Háh-yah-ah-háy!", or a blood-curdling shout. Yet consider all that transpires: hours of dancing, posturing, and pantomime; meaningful

singing and drumming, varying in spirit and purpose from time to time; medicine-making and invocations to the gods,—all of which is so significant and real to the warriors in the dancing-ring that they become transported and frenzied in their will for battle.

Occasionally in the course of a dance, especially in the war-dance, an individual in the group may do a sort of solo dance. By means of gesture and posture, impersonation, and pantomime, he may enact a dramatic scene; he may tell the story of a former battle in which he killed an enemy in a hand to hand struggle; he may portray his method of scouting, or his power as a warrior; he may show how he will track, attack, and destroy his enemies; he may impersonate animals and wounded men, and enact a score of dramatic incidents relevant to the ceremony. The dance pantomime is the root of Indian drama, the only form of drama known to the early American Indians, with the exception of certain seasonal dances and religious ceremonies—and these are simply elaborations of the more common dance pantomimes. In "Thunderdrums"—Sections II-V, "Double-Bear Dances," "Jumping-River Dances," "Ghost-Wolf Dances," and "Iron-Wind Dances"—I have sought to capture the spirit of four solo dances or pantomimes typical of many others in the old war-medicine ceremonies.

The Thunderbird, to which many references are made in the poem, is one of the most powerful of the spirits, a force in the lives of most Chippewas and in the conjurings of the medicine men. The Thunderbird comes to the world in electrical storms; he shows

himself when the black clouds gather on the horizon, when the sky rumbles with thunder, and when the fiery bolts and the jagged lightnings flash overhead.

The words "Cut-throat" and "Pucker-skin" are terms used occasionally to characterize respectively the Sioux and the Chippewa. The meaning of the other Chippewa words and phrases in this poem and in the remaining poems in the group may be gathered from their context; whenever an Indian word is used, its equivalent in English may be found generally in the same line. The spelling, syllabification, and the marks of emphasis convey the accurate pronunciation of all the Indian words.

The expressions, *Ho! Ho!, Ah-hah-háy!, Háh-yah-ah-háy,* and *Wuh!* are typical Chippewa explosives and ejaculations of approval by the audience.

INDIAN SLEEP-SONG

Page 59

In the lodges of the more remote and less civilized Chippewas one may still see Indian cradle-boards, and hear old Indian lullabies. The word cradle-board suggests the purpose of the tík-in-áh-gun as it is called; it is a basswood board on which the Indian baby is bound with beaded cloth and buckskin, and it serves as a carrying-board and a cradle. When the mother wishes her baby to fall asleep, she improvises a hammock from blankets swung between two lodge-poles, places in it the cradle-board to which the baby is lashed, and sings while she swings the hammock and board to and fro.

The lullabies of the Indian mother are in spirit much like those of the white woman, save that they possess a plaintive minor note, and contain very few words—other than the syllables "We-we, we-we," or "Way-way, way-way." In "Indian Sleep-Song" I endeavored to catch the spirit of a typical Indian lullaby, and the rhythm of a swinging cradle-board.

TO A DEAD PEMBINA WARRIOR

Page 61

Among some of the tribes it was the custom to dispose of the dead by placing them in trees, sometimes for a few months until the ground thawed sufficiently for the digging of graves, and sometimes permanently. In the tree-burial practice, the dead Indian was wrapped about with an inner layer of blankets and an outer layer of birchbark which was sewn with fibers or buckskin and sealed with pitch; the birchbark coffin was then placed on a scaffold in the crotch of a tree.

"To a Dead Pembina Warrior" is not an Indian song or chant, but a poem written to an Indian chief who was killed by his enemies in hostile territory, and who, in compliance with his last request, was given a tree-burial.

MEDALS AND HOLES

FIRE-BENDER TALKS

Page 66

The character of the Indian is revealed in his chants and legends and rites, but nowhere more peculiarly than in his council oratory. Therefore, in order to present various phases of the Indian that do not occur in his songs, I have included in this group of chants these two council-talks. They are not translations, but original poems that typify Indian complaints and grievances as they find expression in councils, and that suggest certain mental and emotional phases of the Indian.

For obvious reasons the two poems were written in the broken pidgin-English dialect that a not too civilized mixed-blood interpreter would use, rather than in the smooth and rhetorically precise language of the white man. With few exceptions official interpreters who have translated addresses made in government councils, historians who have recorded some of the famous Indian orations, and novelists and playwrights who have sought to create the beauty of Indian speech, have lost the flavor and the spirit of genuine Indian oratory. In their eagerness to intensify the romantic element and to make the speech of the Indian more easily compre-

hended by the white man through the use of rhetorical devices peculiar to the white man rather than to the Indian, they have made his utterances so smooth, suave, and rhetorically pretty, and so impressive with the grand manner and the studied theatrical attitude, that the few examples of Indian oratory in the English language are more white man than Indian. The Indian has been made too completely ideal and romantic; the poetry of his speech, its naïveté and simplicity, its humor both broad and subtle, its tragedy and elemental power, and its crude wild beauty—these have been smothered and lost in rhetorical elegance.

As a result, notwithstanding four hundred years of contact with the red man, the American is for the most part unaware of the significant primitive poetry of Indian expression. At best the examples of the oratory of the Indian are few; and the few too often have lost the genuine Indian spirit. Moved, therefore, by a desire to preserve and to communicate the less romantic, but perhaps more vital phases of his speech, I offer these two council-talks with the hope that their loss in fluency, polish, and artistry due to the difficult broken dialect in which they are written, may be offset by their gain in spontaneity and naturalness, in ruggedness and primitive power, and in the stark simple beauty of truth.

The frequent references to "the golden medal" in "Medals and Holes" goes back to the days when the Kéetch-ie Ó-gi-má, the "Big Chief",—of the white man, —the President, seeking to win the friendship and the support of influential chiefs, frequently awarded them

medals. Indians have always been childlike in their love of honors and ornaments; the medals presented by the government were therefore greatly prized by them, especially if the decorations were large and shiny and impressive. In the course of a friendly visit with an old chief, he may show me his most precious possessions, his ceremonial garb and his relics; invariably he reserves his medal for the last great moment and presents it proudly as his most telling exhibit.

The expressions, *Ho! Ho!* and *How! How!* mean broadly "Good! Good!", and they have the same significance as the applause of audiences of white men. *Kay-gét! Kay-gét!* is a vehement ejaculation of approval common among the Chippewas, in one sense like the white man's exclamation, "You're right! You're right!"

MAPLE-SUGAR CHANT

Page 69

The Indian is vitally dependent upon nature, for his life touches the wilderness at every point. His so-called pagan religion is based entirely upon a spiritual conception of nature in her manifold forms and moods. Living as he does, therefore, in constant communion with the wilderness—the source of his religious inspiration—most of his acts, and his rites and dances and songs possess a profound spiritual note, a high spiritual color. Whenever an Indian goes hunting and kills a bear, he offers up a prayer to the spirit who is known as the Chief-of-the-Bears; he explains the necessity that drove him to kill one of the Bear-Chief's subjects, he expresses his sorrow, and he thanks the Ruler-of-the-Bears for permission to take one of his children. If the sky is ominous with low black clouds and sudden lightnings, and the pines bend and groan with storm-winds, the Thunderbird-spirit is coming; and perforce the devout Indian will toss a handful of tobacco on the fire as a peace offering to the Thunderbird and make a prayer to placate him. If the spirit-helper of an Indian lives in the Norway pine-tree, the Norway pine is "good medicine"; and whenever he encounters a particularly beautiful pine, he will stop to commune with it. In autumn the tribe may hold a great feast,

thank the Big-Spirit for the rich harvest, and ask him to protect the several families in the band through the winter from sickness and poverty and starvation. In the spring the band may hold a feast-dance in honor of the Big-Spirit, thanking him for his help through the long cold months, and asking him to make a good summer, bountiful with fish and game and fruit and wild rice. Thus a very deep and very real spiritual feeling marks many of the simple daily acts and most of the tribal ceremonies of these primitive people, who, by the unthinking few of an alien race, are erroneously termed pagans.

"Maple-Sugar Chant" is based on a seasonal ceremony that illustrates clearly the spiritual significance of Indian ceremonies. When the first warm days and frosty nights of the spring-thaws arrive, the Indians pack their kettles, buckets, and household goods and move to the maple-sugar bush. There they build their weég-i-wams, or lodges, and prepare to make the yearly supply of maple-sugar.

Before they embark on the business of making sugar, however, a feast must be given to Mother Earth, and to Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo, a powerful legendary character regarded by the Chippewas as a guardian spirit, as a kind of big brother of all the Chippewa Indians. Several very old women first gather a few buckets of the early run of maple-sap—and they must avoid touching or tasting the sap. When the fluid has been boiled down, the sugar is set aside for the ceremony to be held later in the day. In the evening, around the huge fire, a feast is spread for all the families in the camp. One

place is left vacant; a platter of the sugar especially prepared by the old women is set at that place for Wáy-nah-bo-zhóo whose spirit will come out of the night during the ceremony, to join in the feast, to eat the maple-sugar prepared for him, and to bless the tribe with a good sugar season, with a great run of rich and plentiful sap. "Maple-Sugar Chant" is an interpretation of the spirit of this ceremony—not of the specific chants and utterances, for these are few and unimportant in themselves—but rather of the spiritual significance of this seasonal feast.

THE END

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